

**From:** [Murchie, Peter](#)  
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<http://www.kitsapsun.com/story/opinion/2017/01/16/our-view-navys-commitment-clean-water/96558368/>

Our View: Navy's commitment to clean water

A project to [clean the hull of the USS Independence before it's towed out of Sinclair Inlet](#) isn't the first time military activity along our shorelines has come under scrutiny, nor will it be the last. Aging vessels and a major industrial installation on a sensitive waterway, particularly after more than a century of use and designation as a Superfund site, will continue to be a cause for concern to anyone interested in the long-term health of Puget Sound's ecosystem.

But in the most recent case the alarm goes beyond environmental activists, and now the state's Department of Ecology is asking the Navy for a monitoring plan to understand how much copper is released into the water during work that will scrape the aircraft carrier's hull. The request is more than reasonable, given that any other boat would be forced into drydock for similar work, under state and federal pollution laws the military is choosing to exempt itself from. Navy leaders should jump at the chance to demonstrate a commitment to a healthy Puget Sound by sharing a plan with Ecology and the public that includes mitigation measures should the level of toxic sediment increase after this work.

We're optimistic this could happen under the leadership of Rear Admiral Gary Mayes, commander of Navy Region Northwest since last August. Mayes [came to the Northwest](#) from a post with the Navy's energy, installations and environment department in Washington, D.C. Given that background and the groundwork laid by the recently department Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, Mayes has a great opportunity to renew an effort to prove the military's environmental concern. Showing such leadership would avoid litigating a solution — the Suquamish Tribe was quoted in our story of saying legal action is a possibility — honor and acknowledge the stringent state laws that apply to hull-cleanings on non-federal vessels, and square perfectly with the project's intentions. The hull-cleaning itself is a move to prevent the transfer of invasive species to Texas, where the inactive carrier will be towed, and the Navy has acknowledged copper-based paint could leach off during that trip.

This community is proud of the Navy, and just as proud of our environment. It's just the latter needs a little extra protection after a lifetime of industrial activity along our shores, and given the public money spent on such efforts it makes sense to protect that investment. The Navy has made strides in recognizing its impacts and offering solutions to restore habitats. Rear Admiral Mayes should lead by directing the negotiation of a plan that state environmental agencies and local advocates can trust and support, and stay up front and open with the public about the work that will be done.

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